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FACT SHEET

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Effective Court Practice for Abused Elders

The Center for Families, Children & the Courts, of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), is conducting a research project designed to assess the needs of abused elders who must come to court to obtain protection from their abusers, the barriers they face in coming to court, and the effectiveness of court programs and related services in assisting these elderly litigants. The project will focus on a variety of courts, including criminal, civil, family, domestic violence, and probate court, where elders or their caregivers come to seek the court's protection through restraining orders or conservatorships.¹

Goals and Outcomes

The principal outcomes of the project will be training and technical assistance materials for California courts to help them both understand the needs of abused elders and replicate effective practices in serving this population. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the quality of justice for abused elders accessing the court system. Training and technical assistance materials will be developed and disseminated through the AOC's existing network for court training and publications.

Court Involvement

The study design incorporates qualitative and quantitative approaches and includes a statewide assessment of whether courts have adopted practices to address elder abuse needs, as well as more in-depth analysis with courts chosen for this part of the study (the "study courts"). CFCC will select four study courts in California. Study courts will be asked to participate if they have an established program for abused elders or if they want to assess the needs of abused elders and the effectiveness of their current response, such as collaborations and innovative partnerships in the community. The CFCC will conduct site visits, focus groups, and interviews with stakeholders in the

¹ This project is supported by a grant from the Archstone Foundation as part of their Elder Abuse and Neglect Initiative.

study courts' counties and with litigants from elder abuse calendars and their caretakers.

Site visits

Approximately two site visits will be made to each court. The first visit will focus on court operations and the perspective of judicial officers, court staff, government agencies, and community stakeholders. The second visit will focus on collecting feedback from elderly litigants, caretakers, and any additional stakeholders identified during the first site visit. Potential data sources include stakeholder interviews, focus groups, courtroom observation, case file review, and secondary data analysis. CFCC researchers and a multidisciplinary working group of attorneys and problem-solving court specialists will develop needs assessment and evaluation measures in collaboration with the study courts.

Focus groups and interviews

CFCC will organize interviews and focus groups with elderly litigants, caretakers, community stakeholders, and court staff. We hope that the insights obtained from this aspect of the study will provide direction to proposed changes for system improvement.

Statewide surveys

In 2006, the Collaborative Justice Program Unit in CFCC will conduct a survey of all the California trial courts to determine which courts have adopted collaborative justice practices. Questions related to elder abuse programs, court practice, and possible training opportunities will be included in that survey.

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